

# EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT UPDATE

November 1998

## Public safety agencies grapple with Y2K

**A**s the first moments of the new century tick away, no one's quite sure what will happen with the technology society has come to rely on. The year 2000 problem, or Y2K for short, is vexing organizations worldwide with its unpredictability and complexity.

Until recently, computer programmers coded year dates so that the first two digits for this century, "19," were permanently embedded into programs. This was done to save money, reduce data entry and conserve storage space on the computer's hard drive. On January 1, 2000, all the computers and other devices containing these programs will read the date as 1900. The misread date could affect everything from utility companies to financial institutions to digital watches.

"Take the heating system in the local county courthouse," said Mark Pennington, VDES Management Information Systems director. "On the weekends, it resets to maintenance temperature. What happens if the system's clock chip fails to correctly register the date change on the new year and this causes a system failure? It's going to be winter and people will be coming in on Monday to frozen pipes and water everywhere."

Y2K problems could range from shutdowns in power utilities to failures in E911 or in any number of mission-critical systems. "Public safety might be impacted by the shutdown of some system," said Harry Colestock, VDES Recovery and Administrative Services division director. "If you have a failure in one system, it may impact several systems through several levels of local, state or federal government."

"From a public safety standpoint," said

Pennington, "if there is a Year 2000-related crisis, it will fall squarely on the shoulders of local emergency managers to work the problems out with their citizens. They'll be the ones providing shelter, food, water and blankets if a local power utility fails."

Federal agencies, and increasingly, state agencies are mandated to become Y2K compliant. In Virginia, the Century Date Change Initiative Project Office was



established by former Governor George Allen to assist state agencies with meeting this goal. "Compliant means you have assessed all your systems to ensure they work through the year 2000," said Colestock. "In addition, it means the vendors you purchase from have been certified to be Year 2000 compliant."

Generally, emergency services drills don't attract national media. The city of Lubbock, Texas, recently conducted a drill that brought the national media out to witness an exercise incorporating Y2K problems. "The Y2K problem is not unlike a lot of other things we deal with as emergency managers," said the city's emergency manager, Ken Olson. "We have to prepare for worst-case scenarios."

He observed, "For example, you all (in Virginia) prepare for snowstorms — we prepare for tornadoes." Olson explained that the consequences between a natural disaster and disaster as a result of the Y2K problem, such as possible power outages and communications failures, are similar.

"You need to have your contingency plans in place to address potential problems and how you would respond to them," he said. "I think there's a tremendous opportunity for some mitigation activities here. Mitigation in this instance involves the technical side of the Y2K problem — seeking out the issues and determining which ones you can address prior to the turn of the century. As emergency managers, if we're not prepared, it will fall on our shoulders."

With Y2K, as with any disaster, Olson pointed out local government must be prepared to face the first 72 hours alone in the event state or federal resources are not immediately available. "Local government has a responsibility for protecting its own in this early stage," said Olson. "Ultimately with the Y2K problem, we're not trying to paint a picture of panic, but paint a picture of preparedness."

*(For a list of Y2K resources on the Internet and other places, turn to page 2)*

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## Stafford County coordinator makes a difference

**D**edicated public servants can make a difference in their communities. Witness the legacy of Fred Vanous, director of emergency services for Stafford County.

After a 16-year career, Vanous is retiring, but not without permanently changing the scope of his job description. His tireless work in emergency services has impacted its practice in Virginia and has enhanced the safety of Stafford County's citizens against disasters of all types.

In August of 1981, Vanous retired from a distinguished 26-year career with the Marine Corps and joined the county's local government. "This department did not exist when I came to work here," said Vanous. "I was hired as chief communications officer for the dispatch center. Mr. Williams (County Administrator C.M. Williams) established

the post of 'Director of Emergency Services.'"

Vanous was appointed to the position and explained his primary mission at the time. "My main task was to maintain and enhance the volunteer fire and rescue services in the county." During his tenure, fire and rescue grew to include nine volunteer fire departments and nine volunteer rescue squads serving a rapidly growing county.

Some of Vanous' major challenges and accomplishments include implementing E911 in the late 1980s, developing an "efficient and effective emergency operations plan," and participating in the Local Emergency Management Operations Course. The exercise provided the opportunity to establish a state-of-the-art EOC for the county, which was the first in Virginia to take part in the LEMOC. "That was one of our training highlights,"

Vanous said.

Active involvement also included a two-year stint as VEMA president, during which time the midyear conference and the *Viewpoint* newsletter were developed. "Our philosophy was that VEMA could certainly assist with coordinating the Commonwealth's emergency management by providing them with quality training and professional information," said Vanous.

He is a strong supporter of IAEM's Certified Emergency Manager program. During the program's development, Stafford participated, with IAEM, in an extensive evaluation process. "At the end of the first year, Virginia had more CEMs than any other state, including the five from Stafford County," Vanous said. "Emergency management has been elevated so we now have people that have been

certified. Their qualifications are recognized."

Reflecting on his career, Vanous observed, "When I came here, I wanted to contribute to the community. One of my many challenges was trying to ensure that our citizens understood their responsibility for preparedness and providing them with the information so they could be part of the solution and not part of the problem."

He continued, "I believe that, as a director of emergency management for Stafford, one of the real challenges is to educate our governmental body so they have a true understanding of the challenges facing us — to keep the decision makers informed so they can make appropriate and timely decisions regarding public safety."

To contact Vanous, email him at [vanderosa@erols.com](mailto:vanderosa@erols.com)

## Abundant Y2K resources flood Internet

*Listed below are a few resources that may be helpful to Virginia's governmental and public safety needs. (These resources and more can be accessed from the VDES Web site. Go to the "Emergency Management Center" and click on "Y2K Resources")*

**[www.cdci.state.va.us](http://www.cdci.state.va.us):** To keep up with Virginia state government efforts in the Y2K arena, visit the Century Date Change Initiative Project Office Web site. Although primarily tasked with ensuring state agencies are Y2K compliant, its Web site offers vendor and product compliance information and lists helpful links to other sites. If you need a PowerPoint presentation that sums up the issues, you can download one, courtesy the Hampton Roads Y2K Users Group. The office is

planning a public safety summit for January of next year. Visit their Web site for updates. You can call the office at 804/786-1434.

**[www.fema.gov/library/y2k1002.htm](http://www.fema.gov/library/y2k1002.htm):**

As FEMA's involvement in Y2K issues grows, look for more resources to become available over the next several months. The agency's "Statement for the Record" on the Y2K problem is at the above-referenced site which contains links to other Y2K information currently available from FEMA.

**[www.emassociation.org/](http://www.emassociation.org/):** Visit IAEM's greatly expanded Web site for information targeted to the local emergency manager. The site offers advice, checklists, plans and other useful tips. Check back frequently for updates.

**[www.erols.com/steve451/impact.htm](http://www.erols.com/steve451/impact.htm):**

This is another site that caters to the concerns of emergency managers and

other public safety people. You can get good information on planning, preparedness, the threat from embedded systems, and a host of other topics. This five-star site is worth the visit.

**[www.y2k.com](http://www.y2k.com):** Concerned about the potential legal issues related to Y2K failures? This site specializes in Y2K legal and management issues. Sponsored in part by a Virginia law firm, it includes information such as how to rate your Y2K liability and links to vendors and services, among other topics.

**<http://y2k.ci.lubbock.tx.us/y2k.htm>:**

Go to this site to get more information on Lubbock's initiatives. You can download the city's Y2K newsletter as well as gather handy tips and ideas. For more information on the Lubbock Y2K drill from an emergency management perspective, call Ken Olson at 806/775-3052.

# HAZ MAT

## City of Richmond LEPC devises simple solution using EAS notification

**T**he KISS principle (keep it simple and sweet) is a reminder that the best solution is sometimes the simplest, even if the problem is complex.

This past summer, the city of Richmond Local Emergency Planning Committee posed a problem in its quarterly meeting. In the event of a chemical emergency, what's the quickest way to notify endangered citizens? Following that, what's the quickest way to let them know what they need to do to be safe?

"Our LEPC plans were not really adequate in this area," said city Hazardous Materials Coordinator and LEPC committee member Capt. Alan Brooke. "With a chemical emergency, the response time is very low. For example, if the threat is from a wind-borne gas, the only way people can protect themselves is to be quickly notified and to know what to do."

Battalion Chief and committee member Tom Price observed, "Notification has always been a problem. We looked into the possibility of a telephone alert system, but the cost was prohibitive." Price devised a simple solution.

Because the EAS function is integrated into NOAA Weather Radio technology, hazmat emergencies can be broadcast in the same manner severe weather warnings are

disseminated. The only difference is that the weather office uses the "Civil Emergency Message" category — one of several — in the EAS notification system.

"The ability has always been there," said Warning Coordination Meteorologist Bill Sammler. "It's essentially

another way in which the public can be warned of the potential problems for a hazmat incident. All a jurisdiction

needs to do is put it in their plan that they notify us. If they have a specific script they would like us to read, they can fax it to us."

Price explained the committee is initially seeking to outfit the city's public schools with the NOAA Weather Radios, which cost about \$80 for the advanced model that receives area-specific messages.

"If you have a school district with 12 schools, for under a thousand dollars you can equip all of them with NOAA Weather Radios," said Sammler.

"It's certainly a cost-effective method and it's a method that works for us," said Price. "It's something that every locality in Virginia could be using."

For information, call Bill Sammler (Wakefield) at 757/899-5732, Barbara Watson (Sterling) at 703/260-0209 or Mike Emlaw (Blacksburg) at 540/552-1613.



## Policy issues discussed at NEMA conference

**B**ig picture policy debates at the national level will be impacting states and localities over the coming years. At the National Emergency Management Association's Fall Conference this past September, state directors discussed a range of pertinent issues.

"Our profession is becoming much more complex," said VDES Deputy Coordinator George Foresman, who attended the conference. "Over the past decade, the paradigm has shifted so that emergency management issues are no longer only public safety issues. Emergency managers now need to better understand the complexities of government."

Foresman explained that knowledge in areas such as social programs, community and land-use planning and development, code compliance, and economic development is critical to the growth of broad-based emergency management programs.

Some major issues discussed at the conference included:

**Terrorism:** State directors pointed out the need for a national strategy that outlines ways in which first responders at the local and state level will handle acts of terrorism. Most importantly, they seek to more clearly define the federal government role in assisting with preparedness activities at the state and local level. NEMA will promote the development of a coordinated approach for state and local government regarding terrorism consequence management.

**The Stafford Act:** At the behest of Congress, which wants to control disaster costs and streamline disaster assistance programs, FEMA is developing written criteria for federal disaster declarations. One possible outcome of this may be the need for greater accuracy and speed during the assessment phase. In addition, FEMA wants to make sure any written guidelines support mitigation and are easy to understand and administer.

**Public Assistance and IFG Programs:** States want to work with FEMA and establish clearer criteria for eligibility and cost-sharing in the recently revamped PA program. In addition, FEMA has proposed that it completely fund and manage the Individual and Family Grant program. State directors want to retain control of the program, regardless of the level of funding FEMA provides.

**Accreditation:** To help build professionalism, foster credibility, encourage continuous self-improvement and elevate emergency management's role in state and local government, NEMA is working to establish a national accreditation process similar to law enforcement and fire services. If the push is successful, a pilot program will be implemented by the year 2000 and will build on IAEM's successful CEM program.

"We will never do away with disasters, but we can certainly lessen their impact," said Foresman. "Emergency management requires interaction between the three levels of government, as well as key private-sector entities, to ensure we have a clear understanding of where we need to go. We want to be part of this process in Virginia because what will be done in the coming months will affect us for years."

For more information, call George Foresman at 804/897-6501, e-mail: gforesman.des@state.va.us

# Training Calendar

## Emergency Management

### **Disaster Related Needs of Seniors and Persons with Disabilities**

November 9  
James City County

### **Special Event Planning (Pilot)**

November 18  
Salem

### **Rapid Assessment Planning Workshop**

November 19-20  
Richmond

### **Coordinator's Briefing**

December 9-10  
Richmond

### **Exercise Design**

January 6-7  
Richmond

### **Basic Public Information Officer Course**

January 6-8  
Williamsburg  
For information, call the VDES Training Office at 804/897-6557

### **Reservist Training**

### **VEOC Tabletop Exercise I**

November 18  
December 8  
Richmond

### **EIS Sustainment Training**

November 18  
Richmond  
For information, call Lin Saylor at 804/897-6552

## Technological Hazards

### **Advanced Hazardous Materials Control**

November 16-20  
Ashland

### **Chemistry of Hazardous Materials**

November 30-December 11  
Newport News

### **Chemistry of Hazardous Materials (weekend course)**

January 9-10, 23-24,  
February 6-7, 20-21, 27-28  
Location to be announced  
For information, call Ron Hargrave at 804/897-6573

### **Public Safety Response to Terrorism: Awareness**

One class offered on November 7 and 8  
Eastern Shore  
One class offered on November 14 and 15  
Tappahannock  
For information on the Terrorism classes, call Mike Schlemmer at 804/897-6568

## Conferences

### **IAEM Conference (Formerly NCEM)**

November 7-10  
Norfolk  
For information, call 703/538-1795

## VDES Web site adds features

**C**heck out the latest changes to the VDES Web site. One of the new features is a nifty search engine that not only pulls up all the related items, but provides a brief summary of each one. Skim the summaries and click on the interesting ones to get to the main articles.

The Emergency Management Information Center is a "one-stop shopping" site with links to topics and services for Virginia's emergency managers. Its reconfigured training calendar features all VDES courses for this fiscal year as well as updated course descriptions. Click on the relevant link to register online for select classes, or download the .pdf application form.

Register early for the 1999 Virginia Emergency Management Conference. Go to "What's New" and click on the link that brings you to the conference site.

Are you looking for Y2K resources that apply to public safety and government needs? VDES has created a Y2K section that lists links to sites dealing with government and public safety issues. If your locality maintains a Y2K site you'd like to see featured, e-mail: [jhoots.des@state.va.us](mailto:jhoots.des@state.va.us) with the site address.

Check the VDES Web site over the coming months to get the latest updates. Go to: <http://www.vdes.state.va.us>.

## EPA offers debris removal guide

**A**fter a disaster, debris removal can be a major expense for state and local government. Find help in a guide developed by the EPA titled, "*Planning for Disaster Debris.*"

Among many topics, the publication addresses the magnitude of the debris problem that can be created by disasters, describes available federal, state and local resources and offers sources for further information. Case studies from disasters such as Hurricanes Andrew and Iniki and the Midwest Floods are examined for lessons learned. Based on these studies, the book presents ways to plan for and respond to debris removal problems.

To order, call the EPA Document Line at 800/424-9346 (#EPA530-K-95-010), or download at [www.epa.gov/epaoswer/non-hw/muncpl/disaster.htm](http://www.epa.gov/epaoswer/non-hw/muncpl/disaster.htm).



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